

GUMMING GOPHER TO THE MAP

Drawings by F. Vaux Wilson

By SEWELL FORD

I'D heard the front office door pushed open and listened to a couple of heavy steps on the floor runner before I glanced round to find this high party with the wide, stooped shoulders and the rugged face standin' there beamin' at me genial and folksy. In one hand he has a green cloth bag with somethin' square in it, and in the other he has a broad-brimmed soft hat about the color of Camembert cheese. A tank station delegate and no mistake!

"The Horse Dealers' Exchange is over east of Fourth avenue, about eight blocks down," says I.

He chuckles good natured and shakes his head. "You got two more coming to you, Brother," says he.

"Is it sawmill machinery you're lookin' for, then," says I, "or the home office of Marriage Bells?"

"Struck out!" says he. "Now it's my bat. Are you J. Bayard Steele, Mister?"

"Honest, now," says I, "do I look it?"

"Then I reckon you're the other one—Professor McCabe," says he.

"Line hit over center field!" says I. "What's the follow up to that?"

"No hurry," says he. "Have a button first."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin, as he tosses the green bag and yellow lid onto a chair, dives into his side pocket, and proceeds to pin something on my coat lapel.

"Plenty of 'em," says he. "Here, take some for your friends. How's that for a slogan, anyway? 'Go to Gopher!' Good advice too. Gopher's the garden spot of the universe."

"Gopher what—where is it?" says I.

"Why," says he, "Gopher, U. S. A. That's the idea! I'm from there. Hubbs is the name,—Nelson Hubbs, secretary of the Gopher Board of Trade,—and I never miss a chance to give Gopher a boost."

"If this is a sample," says I, "you don't need to make an affidavit. But you wanted to see J. Bayard Steele, didn't you?"

IT was as I'd suspicioned. Mr. Hubbs was No. 4 on the kindly deeds list that Pyramid Gordon had wished on Steele and me. We was to apply soothin' acts and financial balm to all the old grouches that Pyramid had left behind him, you remember, on a commission basis.

Seems J. Bayard had been tracin' Hubbs up by mail for more'n a month, and at that it was just by chance one of his letters had been forwarded to the right place. So Hubbs had come on to see what it was all about.

"Course," says he, "I remember this Gordon; but I didn't think he would me, and I can't see how settlin' up his will could—"

"Threw the hooks into you sometime or other, didn't he?" says I.

"I dun'no's you'd rightly call it that, either," says Hubbs, runnin' his long fingers reflective through his heavy mop of wavy hair. "I was station agent and despatcher out at Kayuse Creek the only time we met up—and of all the forsaken, dreary, one-mule towns along the line that was the worst. I'd been there a year and a half, with no signs of ever gettin' out, and I'd got so I hated every human being in sight, includin' myself. I even hated the people in the trains that went through, because they was goin' somewhere, and I wasn't. You know how it is?"

"Well?" says I.

"So when this special pulled in, two private cars and a blind baggage," he goes on, "and a potty conductor asked me for a clear track to Omaha, I turned him down flat. Might of done it, you know, for the express was four hours behind schedule; but I was just too ornery. I let on I hadn't got the order, made 'em back their old special on a siding, and held 'em there all one blisterin' hot afternoon, while they come in by turns and cussed me. But your Mr. Gordon was the only one that talked straight to the point. 'Let us through, or I'll see that you're fired before morning!' says he, and fired I was. The night freight dropped a new agent, and by breakfast time I was a wanderer on the face of the earth. Which was the best thing, Sir, that ever happened to me! I might have stuck in Kayuse Creek until this day."

"How long was it until you discovered this Gopher

"Did they join in?
Say, the crowd was
ready for anything!"



spot?" says I. "Near a dozen years," says he, "and during that time, Sir, I've had a whirl at more different kinds of industry than you'd believe existed, from runnin' a self binder to canvassin' for the Life of James A. Garfield. It was Possum Oil that brought me good luck. Boiled linseed with camphor and a little tincture of iron was what it was really made of; but there was a 'possum picture on the label, and I've had testimonials provin' that it has cured nearly every disease known to man, from ringworm to curvature of the spine. I'd worked up a fifteen-minute spiel too that was a gem of street corner eloquence, and no matter where I stuck up my flare I could do an evenin's business runnin' from ten to forty dollars."

"So when I hit them corn fritters of Mrs. Whipple's that night in Gopher I had no more notion of quittin' the road than a prairie chicken has of breakin' into a coop. But say, Brother, no human being ever made tastier corn fritters than them. 'Young lady,' says I to the half-grown girl that waited on table, 'who built these?'—'Mrs. Whipple,' says she. 'Present my best compliments to her,' says I, 'and tell me where I can find Mr. Whipple. I want to congratulate him.'—'Lawzee! Whipple?' says she. 'Why, he died back East goin' on six years ago.'—'Then,' says I, 'I'll take the message to Mrs. Whipple myself. She's around, I suppose?'—'No,' says the girl. 'Soon's she got supper ready she had to go down to the square 'lectioneerin'. She's runnin' for Mayor.'

"Say, Professor McCabe, it was a fact! Besides conductin' her boardin' house and bein' president of the Civic League, she was candidate for Mayor on an independent ticket. Got it too, Sir! They have the vote out in our State, you know."

"Well, hearin' that sort of cooled me down a bit. I thought she'd be a hatchet-faced female with a voice like a guinea hen. So I didn't see her until I was all packed up to leave next day and hunted her up to pay my bill. And say, Brother, doggoned if she don't turn out to be about the plumpest, cheeriest, winningest little body that ever I see unclaimed! Nothin' stand-offish about her, either. 'There!' says she. 'Look at you, going off with all that dandruff on your coat collar! Mamie, bring me that whisk broom.'—'Ma'am,' says I, when she'd finished the job and added a little pat to my necktie, 'my name is Hubbs. It's a homely name, and I'm a homely man; but if there's any chance of ever persuadin' you to be Mrs. Nelson Hubbs, I'll stick around this town until the crack of doom.'—

'Now don't be foolish,' says she. 'Run along. I'm busy.' Wa'n't so encouragin', was it? 'Let's see,' says I, 'what place is this anyhow?'—'The idea!' says she. 'It's Gopher; and let me tell you, Mr. Hubbs, some day it's going to be one of the finest cities west of Chicago!'—'While you're in it,' says I, 'it's goin' to be good enough for me. I'm goin' to stay right here.'

"Well, that's what I did, Sir. The Gopher Gazette was for sale, and inside of twenty-four hours I'd bought it, one-third cash, and I've been runnin' it ever since. And I've proposed to Mrs. Whipple once a week reg'lar the whole ten months."

"Only to get more of that run-along-now advice?" says I.

He winks rapid two or three times by way of relievin' his feelin's. "It ain't exactly as bad as that," says he. "I reckon she's kind of got used to my homely face, and if I have any good points at all, you can bet she's found 'em. Anyway, one night a couple of months ago she dropped a hint that was like manna from the sky. I've been livin' on it ever since. 'Nelson,' says she, 'there's only one man I'd have, and that's the man who will put Gopher on the map.'"

"Oh-ho!" says I. "Hence the buttons?"

"That's only part of my scheme," says Hubbs. "The rest I worked out between the time I got word from this Mr. Steele and the day I left for New York. Up to then I hadn't thought of comin' East to boost Gopher; but the letter settled me. 'I'm goin' on,' says I to Mrs. Whipple, 'and if Gopher ain't on the map when I come back, I'll never ask you again to change your name to Hubbs. I'll change mine to Dubb!' So you see, Professor, I ain't got any time to waste. Where can I find Mr. Steele?"

I gave him directions for locatin' J. Bayard, and off he pikes, swingin' the green bag jaunty in one big paw. He'd been here ten minutes, and he'd told me the story of his life. Now see what Steele gets out of him.

SHORTY," says J. Bayard, driftin' in languid after lunch and caressin' his bank president whiskers approvin' as he camps down by the desk, "the deeper I get into the career of your late friend, Pyramid Gordon, the more I am amazed at the infinite pains he took to deal unjustly with so many different persons of no account."

"All of which means, I expect," says I, "that you've